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Jennifer Hofmann*

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Abstract: McGhee described the ability to laugh at yourself as a facet of the sense of humor that is malleable and constitutes the fifth out of six facets forming the sense of humor. Also, McGhee made it measurable by including it in the Sense of Humor Scale (SHS McGhee, Paul E. 1996. *Health, healing, and the amuse system (2. edition): Humor as survival training*. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing). The current study investigated whether individuals ($N = 78$) could laugh at photos in which their face was distorted and mocking captions were added (multi-method approach: self-reports, facial responses assessed by the Facial Action Coding System, unobtrusive measures). Moreover, as two possible pre-conditions of being able to laugh at yourself, acceptance and importance of one's physical appearance were studied. The results show that individuals indeed get amused about themselves, yet, laughing at yourself in McGhee's sense was a better predictor of the absence of negative responses towards the stimuli (in reported emotions, facial responses, ratings of photos) than the presence of positive responses. Accepting ones appearance correlated positively to laughing at yourself. Thus, to be able to laugh at yourself seems to be a continuum, starting from *not feeling negatively* about being the target of a joke to "hearty laughter".

Keywords: Facial action coding system, emotion, laughter, self-directed humor, positive emotions, sense of humor

1 Laughing at yourself as a facet of the sense of humor

To be able to laugh at yourself and not take yourself too seriously is an often-acclaimed core facet of the sense of humor. Allport (1961) viewed a matured sense of humor as closely related to insight, as it involves the ability to laugh at yourself while maintaining a sense of self-acceptance. Schmidt-Hidding (1963) claimed that "somebody has no idea of humor if he does not like laughter at his own expense". Yet, only few empirical studies have investigated the construct of "laughing at yourself". Ruch (2009) drew attention to the fact that "(...) the most

***Corresponding author: Jennifer Hofmann,** University of Zurich, Institute of Psychology, Binzmuhlestrasse 14/7, 8050 Zurich, Switzerland, E-mail: j.hofmann@psychologie.uzh.ch

commonly agreed core element of the sense of humor has not received much empirical attention, namely the often-acclaimed ability of humans to laugh at their own expenses" (p. 43).

McGhee's concept of the sense of humor entails the ability to laugh at yourself (LAY) as one of the seven humor habits (i.e., McGhee 1996; McGhee 2010). To be able to LAY means to benevolently look at one's own personal weaknesses, blunders, and mishaps, seeing the funny side of embarrassing or annoying situations, and being able to be amused without disparaging oneself. Yet, LAY does not mean not to take yourself seriously at all, having a low opinion of yourself, putting yourself down or being "incompetent, unprofessional, immature or irresponsible" (p. 89). It means to *accept* one's weaknesses and mishaps and being able to distance oneself from them. Laughing about yourself leads to favorable outcomes, such as amusement and liberation, coping with an averse situation, overcoming a mishap or dealing constructively with one's weaknesses (McGhee 2010). Even more, LAY may be used to one's advantage, i.e. by diffusing criticism through joking about it (McGhee 1996; McGhee 2010).

Not surprisingly, LAY is a facet of the sense of humor that is more difficult to develop and train, as it builds on self-acceptance, perspective taking, experience or maturity (McGhee 1996, for empirical evidence see Ruch et al. in this issue). Negative feelings and reactions often hinder individuals from being able to laugh at themselves. Thus, such negative feelings (i.e., anger, fear) need to be overcome as a first step towards LAY.

McGhee was the first who made laughing at yourself measurable via self-report in the Sense of Humor Scale (SHS, McGhee 2010). Individuals assign themselves the possession of this ability to varying degrees (Ruch and Carrell 1998) and being able to laugh at yourself (measured by the SHS) was found to correlate to $r = 0.50$ with trait cheerfulness (see Ruch and Hofmann 2012 for an overview). Furthermore, the two seriousness facets of the State-Trait Cheerfulness Inventory (STCI; Ruch et al. 1996) had incremental validity: LAY was found to be highest among those cheerful individuals who do *face things seriously*, but also *communicate humorously*.

Beermann and Ruch (2011) studied whether participants would display signs of amusement in the face and the voice (e.g., Ruch 1993), and report more cheerful mood when being confronted with photographs in which they were displayed in a funnily distorted way. They found a moderate convergence between objective (facial behavior) and subjective (self-reports) methods of assessing LAY. Moreover, participants who rated their distorted photos as funny and were overtly smiling and laughing as a reaction to the photos showed higher values on the SHS subscale LAY than participants with no such appraisal of and responses to the photos. Importantly, participants who reported that they could laugh at themselves

showed genuine enjoyment displays[1] (Duchenne Displays, see Ekman et al. 1990). Thus, "laughing at yourself" means to be genuinely amused about oneself, while the intensity of the amusement predicts whether individuals simply report being amused, smile or laugh (e.g., Ruch 1993).

Extending the work of Beermann and Ruch (2011), the aims of this study were twofold. First, to investigate the role of two pre-conditions for LAY: acceptance and the importance of one's physical appearance. As one's physical appearance is hard to change, it serves as a good indicator of accepting features of oneself that cannot be changed much. In the sense of Ryff and Corey Lee (1995), "self-acceptance" is one of six aspects of well-being. It entails a positive attitude toward the self, acknowledging and accepting multiple facets of the self (of which one's appearance may be one), including good and bad qualities, and feeling positive about one's past life (p. 727). This description entails that also bad qualities are accepted, just like features of one's appearance, that one may dislike but cannot change. It is thus argued that if one accepts his or her physical features, it will not be perceived as a threat to the self if the appearance is made fun of. Even more, it is expected that the acceptance of one's appearance can facilitate to see the funny side of one's appearance being distorted – leading to more amusement when one is confronted with a funny view on one's physical appearance. The idea to study the influence of the importance of one's appearance came from McGhee's notion that LAY does not mean not to take yourself seriously at all – individuals should actively work on "lightening up" (McGhee 1996) about their weaknesses and blunders and desensitize about "sensitive areas" (from minor items to heavy ones, see McGhee 1996, p. 89). Considering one's physical appearance as important has been denominated a facet of vanity and is also linked to non-clinical narcissism (see e.g., Egan and Cara 2007). Individuals with high scores on narcissism rate their physical appearance as more important than individuals with low scores (Jackson et al. 1992) and they prefer looking at themselves in the mirror (Robins and John 1997). Consequently, considering one's appearance as important may go along with trying to maintain it or improve it as much as possible (see e.g. Durvasula and Lysonski 2008). Thus, it was hypothesized that the more important one considers ones appearance, the more difficult it could be to laugh at it (or laugh at a distorted form of it).

1 The experience of joy in general and some facets of positive emotions in particular were linked to the expression of the Duchenne Display (DD; the joint and symmetric contraction of the zygomatic major and orbicularis oculi pars orbitalis muscles; Ekman et al. 1990). The DD is distinguishable from other smiles and laughs, correlates with self-ratings of positive experience, and occurs when recalling positive emotions, amusement among them (e.g., Hofmann et al. 2017; Ruch 1993; Scherer and Ceschi 2000).

Secondly, it was aimed at furthering the knowledge on LAY. It was aimed to not only assess humor-related moods when being put in a situation where LAY was possible (see Beermann and Ruch 2011), as moods are less fluctuating than emotions (e.g. state cheerfulness is longer lasting and less fluctuating than amusement, see Ruch and Hofmann 2012). Consequently, important short-lived emotional responses might not have been captured in earlier studies. Thus, it was aimed to assess a range of positive and negative emotions one could experience when being put in such a situation. This would give more detailed insight in the responses of individuals, making it possible to decompose aspects of benevolent and maladaptive forms of LAY, as well as mixed-emotions. Individuals with higher LAY should not only experience amusement, but also be lacking negative emotions, such as shame, uneasiness, embarrassment, or anger and showing facial displays indicating negative emotions to a lesser extent, compared to individuals with lower LAY.

Furthermore, the "innocent jokes" utilized by Beermann and Ruch (2011; p. 499) were modified to target the person more strongly: captions targeting the person's physical appearance and other personal features (character/virtue, kinesthetic ability, intelligence) were added. This was done to design the stimuli more clearly as self-directed humor (in the stimuli utilized by Beermann and Ruch, there was the possibility that individuals would not recognize themselves and consequently just laugh at an unfamiliar distorted face in the sense of an incongruous stimulus with no or only a partial resolution). Lastly, it was of interest whether different ways of assessing LAY would show convergent validity (self-reported LAY and emotions, rated funniness and aversiveness towards the photos, behavioral markers; i.e., displayed smiles and laughs, and an unobtrusive measure assessing global markers of LAY).

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 78 German-speaking adults (36 males, 42 females) between 20 and 64 years of age ($M = 28.41$, $SD = 8.92$). The majority was single (91 %), 3.8 % were married, 1.3 % widowed, and 3.8 % divorced. The majority of the sample indicated to be studying (59.7 %), 36.4 % were full-time working, 2.6 % indicated to be unemployed and 1.3 % of the participants did not report on their employment situation.

2.2 Instruments

The German language version of the *Sense of Humor Scale* (SHS, McGhee 1996) is a 40-item questionnaire assessing the sense of humor after McGhee on a 4-point answer scale (1 "*strongly disagree*"; 4 "*strongly agree*"). The subscale on LAY was analyzed (Cronbach's Alpha in the current sample was satisfactory, $\alpha = 0.77$).

The *Emotion Report* (ER, Ekman et al. 1980, German adaptation for the purpose of this study by Hofmann) was adapted to assess 12 emotions experienced in a specific situation on a 9-point answer scale (0 "*not felt*" to 8 "*strongly felt*"): anger, embarrassment, fear, disgust, sadness, shame, sorrow, uneasiness, amusement, cheerful composure, contentment, and joy.

The *acceptance of one's physical appearance* was assessed by three items on a 7-point scale (1 "*strongly disagree*"; 7 "*strongly agree*"). The *importance* was assessed by one item "How important is your physical appearance to you" on a 7-point scale (1 "*not at all important*"; 7 "*very important*").

The *global markers indicating LAY* consisted of six items: 1) wanting to see more distorted photos of oneself (yes/no), 2) wanting to distort their own face on the computer (yes/no), 3) telling an embarrassing story and how embarrassing this story was (open answering format; peer-rated from 1"*not at all embarrassing*"; 4 "*extremely embarrassing*"), 4) laughing if somebody showed embarrassing photos of their childhood (yes/no), 5) laughing if others told embarrassing stories of their past (yes/no), and 6) the degree to which the material could be used (consent form; for further details see Beermann and Ruch 2011).

The *Distorted Photograph with Captions Task* (DPCT; adapted after Beermann and Ruch 2011) entailed four photographs of the participant applying four different distorting effects in the program Photo Booth 7.0 (Apple Macintosh), see Figure 1.

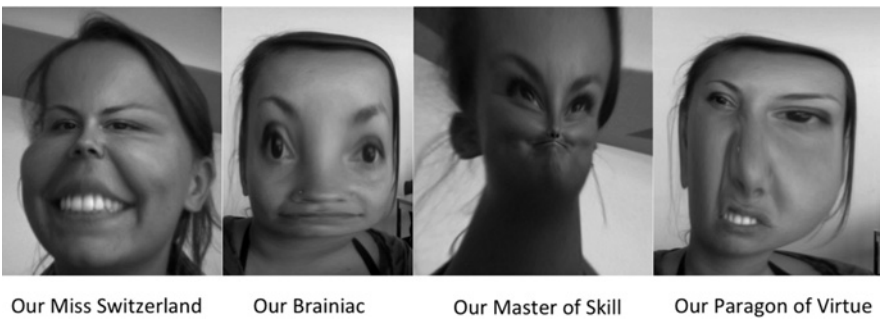

Figure 1: Example photos of the distorted photographs with captions task.

Each photo was subtitled with a phrase targeting the person with regards to physical appearance ("Miss/Mister Switzerland"), intelligence ("our brainiac"), character/virtue ("our paragon of virtue") and kinesthetic ability ("our master of skill"). In the task, the participants are presented with the photos and asked to indicate the funniness (1 "*not funny*"; 7 "*very funny*") and aversiveness (1 "*not aversive*"; 7 "*very aversive*").

2.3 Facial measurements

Facial expressions and vocalizations were recorded by a hidden camera. The video clips were coded with the Facial Action Coding System (FACS, Ekman et al. 2002). The FACS is an anatomically based method allowing any visually discriminative change in the face to be coded. Every alone standing facial muscle movement is described as an Action Unit (AU). The FACS allows for a distinction of different smiles and within enjoyment displays, it can distinguish different degrees of amusement (see Ruch 1993). The clips were coded by a certified FACS coder. Additionally, five videos were coded by another coder. The inter-rater reliability was 0.86. Four types of facial responses were considered: symmetric AU12 of low intensities without the occurrence of the AU6 (Ruch 1993: low intensities of amusement may not elicit a Duchenne Display (DD), but as a pre-stage, elicit a weak but symmetrical contraction of the zygomatic major muscle); the absolute frequency of independent DDs; laughter (the combination of a DD and a vocalization), and smiles including markers of negative emotions (conjoint occurrence of AU12 and one or a combination of following AUs: AU14 (Dimpler), AU 20 (Lip Stretcher), AU15 (Lip Corner Depressor), gaze aversion and AU24 (Lip Presser).

2.4 Procedure

Participants were recruited through mailing lists, social platforms, and leaflets. After showing interest in a study on "humor appreciation and the rating of visual stimuli," participants left their postal addresses and were sent the set of questionnaires, containing the SHS, and the items on the acceptance and importance of their physical appearance. Once in the lab, participants were asked for their permission to take a photograph of them, allegedly for another study investigating physiognomy (for the detailed procedure on this, see Beermann and Ruch 2011). Four distorted photographs of participants

were taken. Then, the participants completed the experimental task similar to the one outlined by Beermann and Ruch (2011). Afterwards, they filled in the ER and were presented with their four distorted photos with captions and rated each for funniness and aversiveness. Afterwards, they again filled in the ER. A hidden camera videotaped their face. At the end, participants were debriefed and offered to have the video material deleted. No one took the offer.

3 Results

3.1 Induction of amusement

It was investigated whether the distorted photos induced amusement in the participants. In line with the expectations, 91.7 % of the participants displayed at least one symmetric AU12, 90.3 % at least one genuine DD, and 62.5 % laughed at least once in response to the photos. Thus, the photos with captions indeed induced amusement. Moreover, 72.2 % displayed at least one AU12 accompanied by markers of negative emotions. This finding substantiates McGhee's notion that negative feelings often occur in situations where LAY would be possible. Additionally, the funniness ratings were substantially correlated to the frequency of facially displayed amusement ($r(70) = 0.36$, $p < 0.01$ to laughter, $r(70) = 0.37$, $p < 0.01$ to DDs, $r(70) = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$ to symmetric AU12).

3.2 Convergent validity of the different methods of assessing laughing at yourself

Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations, as well as the correlations among the different ways of assessing LAY.

As seen in Table 1, LAY in the sense of McGhee (assessed by the SHS) was a good indicator of the emotions felt after the experiment: higher scores went along with more self-reported amusement, contentment, joy, and cheerful composure, less uneasiness, less shame, less anger, and less sorrow (expectedly, no relations were found to emotions reported before the task, thus, for reasons of brevity only emotions reported after the task are presented, see Table 1). Surprisingly, SHS-LAY did not show strong relations to facial indicators of positive emotions, but went along with displaying fewer facial displays entailing markers of negative emotions. Also, individuals indicating higher

LAY experienced less aversiveness towards the photos, but no relation to funniness was found (though it went in the expected direction).

The SHS-LAY also correlated moderately positively to the global markers of LAY (see Table 1), showing the convergence between the two assessment methods. Interestingly, the global markers correlated positively to the rated funniness. As McGhee's concept of LAY, the global markers went along with higher felt amusement, contentment, joy, cheerful composure, less uneasiness, less shame, less anger, less sorrow, and less embarrassment. Moreover, the higher the score for the global markers, the more DDs, laughter, and symmetric AU12 were displayed, while it was unrelated to the display of AU12 with markers of negative emotions.

Table 1: Correlations of the different markers of laughing at yourself, self-reported acceptance and importance, funniness and aversiveness ratings, and facial indicators.

Variables	M	SD	SHS laughing at yourself	Global markers
Global markers of LAY	2.24	0.47	0.42***	1
Acceptance	14.83	3.51	0.33**	0.19
Importance	5.30	0.88	−0.17	0.08
Ratings of photos				
Funniness	4.88	1.25	0.15	0.37**
Aversiveness	2.59	1.46	−0.22*	−0.06
Emotion Report post task				
Amusement	5.54	1.94	0.31**	0.53***
Cheerful composure	5.56	1.92	0.44***	0.46***
Contentment	3.91	2.03	0.28*	0.49***
Joy	4.83	2.15	0.30**	0.53***
Anger	0.51	1.29	−0.44***	−0.38**
Disgust	0.53	1.39	−0.16	−0.13
Embarrassment	1.22	1.55	−0.24*	−0.23*
Fear	0.26	0.76	−0.05	−0.03
Sadness	0.28	0.82	−0.19	−0.26*
Shame	1.13	1.60	−0.38**	−0.31**
Sorrow	0.35	0.82	−0.19	−0.32**
Uneasiness	1.50	1.73	−0.31**	−0.24*
Facial Indicators				
Frequency AU12	2.78	1.50	−0.07	0.27*
Frequency DD	2.75	1.56	−0.07	0.32**
Frequency laughter	1.49	1.52	−0.01	0.28*
Frequency AU12 + negative markers	1.21	1.06	−0.22^{+}	0.05

Notes. $N = 72–78$. LAY = Laughing at yourself. SHS = Sense of Humor Scale (McGhee 1996). *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. $^{+}p < 0.05$ one-tailed; $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

3.3 Personal importance and acceptance

Bivariate Pearson correlations were computed to establish the relationships between the importance and acceptance of physical appearance, and the different methods of assessing LAY. The importance was unrelated to the acceptance of one's appearance ($r(76) = -0.03$, n.s.). Thus, whether one considers their looks as important or not is unrelated to whether they accept their looks. Also, the importance was not related to the self-reported ability to LAY (see Table 1). Moreover, the higher the self-rated importance of one's physical appearance, the higher was the self-rated amusement ($r(76) = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) and funniness ($r(76) = 0.26$, $p < 0.05$), as well as the aversiveness ($r(76) = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$ one-tailed). Also, higher importance went along with displaying more smiles accompanied by markers of negative emotions ($r(70) = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$).

With regard to the acceptance, a positive correlation to effects of LAY was found, in line with the expectations. Considering the reported emotions, negative relations to reported shame ($r(76) = -0.21$, $p < 0.05$) and sadness ($r(76) = -0.21$, $p < 0.05$) were found, as well as positive relations to cheerful composure ($r(76) = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$). Acceptance was expectedly negatively related to aversiveness ($r(76) = -0.23$, $p < 0.05$). Surprisingly, acceptance was unrelated to funniness ($r(76) = -0.05$, n.s.). With regards to the facial displays of enjoyment, the higher the acceptance, the more DDs were shown towards the photos ($r(76) = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$).

4 Discussion

This study tested whether individuals would feel amusement about themselves when being put in a situation where LAY was possible. This was done by confronting them with distorted photographs of themselves coupled with ironic captions targeting the person. The main findings show that people indeed get amused about themselves and this converges moderately over different ways of assessing the ability to laugh at yourself (replicating evidence reported by Beermann and Ruch 2011). Yet, this study used clearly self-directed stimuli, ruling out alternative explanations for participants' amusement (such as laughing at the incongruous stimulus – the distorted face– while not recognizing oneself). Furthermore, the current results extend former findings by showing that the acceptance of one's physical features correlates positively to being able to LAY. This gives first support for McGhee's so far untested notion, that acceptance is an important condition to benevolently laughing at oneself. Moreover, this is in line with findings on the concept of "self-acceptance" by Ryff and Corey Lee (1995),

who claim that self-acceptance is one facet of well-being. They further report that self-acceptance positively relates to environmental mastery (Ryff and Corey Lee 1995). With respect to laughing at oneself, it may be argued that finding benevolent amusement in one's distorted self is the adaptive response ("mastery") of the situation when being confronted with the distorted self.

The Sense of Humor scale by McGhee (1996) showed moderate convergence with other self-report assessment methods (reported global behavioral markers of LAY, reported emotions). Thus, the SHS serves as an economic way of assessing this facet. With regards to facially expressed amusement, SHS-LAY was an indicator of the absence of facial displays entailing markers of negative emotions. Similarly, the SHS-LAY correlated negatively to the rated aversiveness towards the photos with captions, while being unrelated to the degree of funniness. Thus, the results show that LAY is not solely the elicitation of positive emotions, but also the absence of negative emotions.

For this finding, two possible explanations may be offered: On one hand, LAY may best be seen as a continuum, starting with the absence of negative responses and ending in high amusement about oneself (i.e., "hearty laughter," McGhee 1996, p. 89). This would be in line with McGhee, who postulates that initially a sensitive topic may provoke negative reactions, which can be gradually overcome by changing perspective, talking about it, re-evaluating and finally seeing the "light side" or funny side of it (and then heartily laughing about it and even joking about it). Further evidence towards this notion comes from the reports the participants gave in the debriefing about what they liked and disliked in the study. Overall, 24 participants referred to the funniest moment of the experiment with a statement like: "Seeing the title "our master of skill" coupled with my funny looking face made me smile, as I am a very clumsy person," acknowledging the irony in the caption. A female participant stated: "the title our Miss Switzerland coupled with a very distorted Sybille- face had me laughing out loud, the smile lasted until the end of the experiment," or yet another female participant said "I wondered what the face of the real Miss Switzerland would look like if her face was distorted with that program – I think she would look silly too and if our photos were then compared, I think I would have a fair chance of winning the competition too!" The later statement shows that the participant found something funny by taking another perspective (thinking of the real beauty queen being distorted) to see the light side of seeing her distorted face. In contrast, individuals with lower scores on the SHS-LAY mentioned the presence of negative emotions more often: "I felt anger as well as a notion of funniness: the photo titled "Miss Switzerland" was so ridiculous that it was funny again" or "the captions made the photos very personal and thus less funny, I felt a bit ashamed as well".

The notion of LAY being a continuum, starting with the absence of negative responses to the experience of amusement, may explain why this study did not find a positive relation of the SHS-LAY to facial indicators of amusement (while Beermann and Ruch did find such a correlation). The stimuli utilized here (as compared to Beermann and Ruch) were more self-directed and confronting, thus "being harder to digest" even by individuals with a high ability to LAY. Consequently, the absence of negative emotions was the response by individuals with the ability to LAY, while the stimuli by Beermann and Ruch were more easy, thus also allowing for more frequent positive responses.

On the other hand, a second possible explanation would be that undoing negative emotions – or hindering them from occurring – may be the primary important function of LAY, while the occurrence of positive emotion is secondary. In this case, the situation is already well coped with when the negative effects of an embarrassing or stressful situation do not take their course, but are hindered.

In general, the degree of acceptance of one's physical appearance was positively correlated to LAY, in line with the expectations. The results further indicated that the acceptance is a better indicator of the absence of negative responses than positive ones. Yet, the absence of negative responses may be the first step of benevolently laughing at yourself, in line with McGhees' writings.

With respect to the importance of one's physical appearance, the greater the importance of one's appearance, the greater the funniness as well as the aversiveness of the stimuli. Thus, the distorted self gave occasion for amusement but some individuals seemed to also be averse towards having their face distorted. Converging with the self-reports, the higher the rated importance, the more smiles accompanied by markers of negative emotions were shown, including smiles mixing joy with anger or contempt or "bare and grin" smiles. As Ruch (1990) showed, funniness and aversiveness towards a humorous stimulus are separate dimensions. One can find a joke funny and at the same time aversive. Similarly, it is hypothesized that the individuals with a higher importance of their physical appearance may be more ambivalent towards the distorted photos with captions. As the topic is important to them, they might find it aversive to see their face distorted, although they do not deny the funny side of it. The more important an issue, the more difficult it might be to poke fun at it (in the view of McGhee "heavier items," p. 88).

McGhee notes that the scientific evaluations of his seven humor habits program show that LAY often does not increase through short trainings. He summarizes "to poke fun at yourself might be the most difficult humor skill to acquire" (McGhee 1996, p. 132). Yet, the current results suggest that an increase in LAY as measured by the SHS might be a rather strict criterion to evaluate a

change in LAY, as it only measures change at the highest stage of accomplishment. More specifically, to train one's ability to laugh at yourself, McGhee suggests one should first habitualize with the prior humor habits, in order to have strengthened humor skills. Then, one can gradually de-sensitize about one's weaknesses and mishaps. As an initial step, sensitive areas should be identified and made aware of. Then, one can work on de-sensitizing towards "lighting up" about those issues (McGhee 1996; McGhee 2010) by talking about them, finding new perspectives on judging these issues, habits, and personal features. Through accepting weaknesses and situations that cannot be changed, one gains control and overcoming. The acceptance thus allows stepping away from initial negative response. For example, one's responses to a joke targeted at him-or herself or an embarrassing situation should be reflected and negative feelings need to be identified. Later, one can start producing humor about one's weaknesses and even prepare responses to embarrassing situations.

Generally, the items of the SHS-LAY scale indicate mastery of the last stage mentioned above: "I have *no trouble* poking fun at my physical imperfections," "I *often* find humor in my own embarrassing incidents or personal blunders," "I *often* share with others the humor in my blunders/embarrassing incidents," "I find it *easy* to laugh when I am the butt of the joke". Yet, a *measure of change* in LAY may include indicators of the mastery of earlier stages while training LAY, e.g., items that indicate the decrease of negative emotions, the increase of acceptance, the start of perspective taking, etc. Only after time, when all the different stages of LAY are mastered, an increase in LAY as currently measured by the SHS might be found. Therefore, to evaluate training progress, SHS may be extended by items assessing earlier achievements as well.

The current approach is limited by the fact that only one aspect of a person that can possibly be laughed at was included. Only the passive appreciation of ironic captions targeting the persons' own distorted appearance was tested. Seeing ones' distorted face is a caricature of one's appearance and through the extreme distortion, it may be more easy to distance oneself from it. Yet, the features that one might not like about his or her face are even more accentuated through the distortion, thus pointing to the sensitive area of ones' face and allowing to assess whether one can laugh about them or not.

To conclude, the current study delivers encouraging results that "laughing at yourself" indeed exists (cf. Beermann and Ruch 2011). It was shown that individuals do get amused and do experience less negative responses towards the photos with captions when they report being able to laugh at themselves. Further studies should investigate other person features (intelligence, different skills, character) and also study other settings, i.e., where individuals get the chance to laugh at themselves in socially relevant situations or where they can get active after an embarrassing

incident to show that they can take it lightly (in contrast to the passive appreciation). Moreover, future studies might investigate whether individuals would not only laugh at their weaknesses and blunders, but also at their strengths and situations of success. Not taking oneself too seriously in such situations (while not being self-deprecating!) may be an indicator of modesty. Finally, *laughing at yourself* does exist, but "laughing" may be the extreme end of the continuum, which on the other end starts with not experiencing negative emotions.

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Bionote

Jennifer Hofmann

Jennifer Hofmann PhD, is a senior teaching and research fellow at the department of personality and assessment (Institute of Psychology), University of Zurich. Her current research interests are in personality and assessment, humor, en-and decoding of positive emotions, as well as nonverbal behavior (applying the Facial Action Coding System), with a special interest in laughter.